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April 29, 2008

Government Continues Strong Commitment to Labrador Through Northern Strategic Plan

The *Northern Strategic Plan for Labrador* (NSP) continues to demonstrate that by working together, citizens, government, and communities can achieve positive change.

In keeping with the mandate of the NSP to improve infrastructure and programs and services throughout the region, approximately \$66.5 million will be invested to continue progress on the Trans Labrador Highway (TLH) and to improve local roads. This includes \$45 million in cost-shared funding for widening and hard-surfacing Phase I of the Trans Labrador Highway (\$22.5 million from the province) and \$17 million for construction of Phase III. A further \$4.5 million will be allocated under the Provincial Roads Improvement Program for various projects throughout Labrador.

"Last year \$32 million was allocated for the Trans Labrador Highway, including \$15 million to begin widening Phase I," said the Honourable John Hickey, Minister of Labrador Affairs. "This construction season our commitment to this highway and to the people of Labrador is reflected in our unprecedented funding, which has doubled."

Minister Hickey and the Honourable Patty Pottle, Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, also welcome the further investment of approximately \$6.7 million in new initiatives through Budget 2008.

"When Premier Williams launched the *Northern Strategic Plan for Labrador* in 2007, we had one goal in mind - to lay a foundation for the future growth and prosperity of Labrador," said Minister Hickey. "The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador is indeed fulfilling its commitment to enhance the lives of all Labradorians."

"*The Northern Strategic Plan for Labrador* is addressing the many challenges faced by people living on the coast of Labrador," said Minister Pottle. "With important initiatives such as the \$1.6 million electricity rebate for home owners using diesel-generated power and \$1.24 million for the Medical Transportation Program and many other significant investments, the William's Government has made the future brighter for Labrador."

The NSP is in its second year of a five-year mandate in which over \$300 million will be spent on new and ongoing initiatives. The NSP is a living document that is updated regularly to adjust to changes in demography, technology, society and the economy. The plan will continue to grow as the needs of the communities of Labrador are addressed. Within the Department of Labrador and Labrador Affairs, Budget 2008 initiatives include:

- \$275,000 to purchase a new winter groomer for Postville;
- \$200,000 under the *Poverty Reduction Strategy* for increased funding to the Air Foodlift Subsidy, bringing the total annual investment to \$600,000;
- \$200,000 for the enhancement of the winter trails on the North Coast; and,

- \$20,000 to increase the Combined Councils of Labrador funding for a total of \$120,000.

The NSP is the result of extensive public consultations and input, supplemented by cross-departmental efforts. It identifies a wide range of initiatives dedicated to advancing programs and services throughout Labrador. The following investments under various government departments show a clear commitment to the betterment of Labrador communities.

- \$18.8 million for health infrastructure;
- \$2.1 million to build a depot in Cartwright Junction to ensure proper summer and winter maintenance along this section of the Trans Labrador Highway between Happy Valley-Goose Bay and Cartwright, which will be completed in 2009;
- \$200,000 under the *Poverty Reduction Strategy*, to expand eligibility for the Northern Allowance to all Income Support clients who maintain a residence in coastal Labrador;
- \$60,000 to establish an Aboriginal Literacy Development consultant in Labrador to work closely with members of the Aboriginal community to develop culturally relevant literacy and Adult Basic Education programs to address the literacy needs of Aboriginals; and,
- a new position of Aboriginal Health Consultant is being created within the Department of Health and Community Services. This position will result in an enhanced focus on aboriginal health issues in partnership with the regional health authorities and aboriginal groups.

Justice

The Department of Justice has dedicated significant funding to issues of importance to the people of Labrador. Key investments include:

- \$698,200 for six new members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) in the region. Four of these officers will be dedicated to providing support to isolated communities while the other two officers will be constables dedicated to stemming the flow of drugs into Labrador, an issue of importance highlighted by leaders of the Innu and Inuit peoples;
- \$300,000 for the planning and design of a pre-trial detention centre in Happy Valley-Goose Bay for youth, women and those who suffer mental health illness;
- \$200,800 to establish a Legal Aid office in Labrador West; and,
- \$100,000 for a Gladue Court in Sheshatshiu, which specializes in the treatment of Aboriginal offenders and operates on the premise that Aboriginal peoples face unique challenges.

"Justice issues in Labrador are a priority for our government and I am proud to announce significant initiatives to improve the administration of justice in the region," said the Honourable Jerome Kennedy, Minister of Justice and Attorney General. "The implementation of a Gladue Court pilot project, increased police presence for isolated communities and planning for a pre-trial detention centre in Happy Valley-Goose Bay are reflective of the concerns we have heard from the people of Labrador. Aboriginal leaders have clearly stated they want a justice system that understands the unique circumstances of their people. These actions are first steps and we will continue to work closely with them, and all residents of Labrador, on these matters."

Tourism, Culture and Recreation

The *Northern Strategic Plan* recognizes recreation and sport as important aspects of health and well-being. The Provincial Government's recreation and sport strategy, *Active, Healthy Newfoundland and Labrador* (2007), also identifies the need to enable all citizens to be physically active on a regular basis, and to provide more access to recreation and sport opportunities for those in under-represented groups, including Aboriginal peoples and residents of rural and remote communities.

Budget 2008 builds on earlier investments in the Labrador Travel Subsidy, which provides increased opportunities for Labrador residents to participate in cultural and sporting events, and to funding provided to the Aboriginal Sport and Recreation Circle to manage recreation and sport projects for

Aboriginal youth. Key investments include:

- \$500,000 for continued investment in the Labrador Winter Games;
- \$50,000 to support Aboriginal athletes' participation in the North American Indigenous Games (NAIG); and,
- \$50,000 to implement an Intangible Cultural Heritage strategy for Aboriginal peoples, which is designed to preserve traditional languages, and unique knowledge, skills, customs and music.

"Government continues to support recreation and sport activities in Labrador and to provide new opportunities for athletes to compete in provincial, national and international games and events," said the Honourable Clyde Jackman, Minister of Tourism, Culture and Recreation. "We are particularly pleased to announce funding to support Aboriginal athletes' participation in the 2008 North American Indigenous Games, as this will be the first time Newfoundland and Labrador will send a team to this event."

A copy of the Northern Strategic Plan and a complete list of new initiatives emerging from the NSP year two can be found at www.gov.nl.ca/laa/nspl/. To order a copy of the Northern Strategic Plan, please call 1-888-435-8111.

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Backgrounder

1. Northern Strategic Plan for Labrador Budget 2008 Initiatives

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2008 04 29

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